

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN ASSAM

#### 5. Introduction:

Retrospection of the events in the path of peace building initiatives by the civil society organizations is an important part of the study. The first civil society initiative in Assam is the endeavor of the All Assam Democratic Citizen's Association (AADCA) which is established in 1990 in Guwahati. The last initiative so far is the initiative by Sanmilito Jatiya Abhivartan brought up with the leadership of Dr. Hiren Gohain in the year 2010. During this period of the first initiative to the latest trial to facilitate the peace process between the conflicting parties, many ups and downs of the events are witnessed by citizens of Assam. While media is the active documenter of chronological events of every move of the civil society initiatives and the responding bodies to the peace process, it is utmost need of the researcher to gather the chronological events and spectacles the events purposefully to analyze the depth of the civil society initiatives and the allied matters relating to the process.

This chapter is the presentation of the content analysis extracted from Assamese daily, "Dainik Asom", "The North East Times" and "The North East Sun".

#### 5.1 Major highlights of the news on peace building initiatives by civil society in Assam:

The front page of North East times published with the titled "Intellectuals call for unity" some noted intellectualities urged different communities to maintain peace and harmony in a public meeting. The meeting was organized by the All Assam Democratic Citizen's Organisation in front of the Meghdoot Bhavan. While the meeting was presided over by noted Sahitya Academy and Jnanpeeth Award winner Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, he said the history of Ram Janmabhumi-Babri Masjid was an example of how communal tension was instigated through this incident. He appealed to all sections of people to negotiate the issue of ULFA with discussions and not through bloodshed. In the meeting, other speakers openly alleged some politicians were responsible for instigating the people of the country and they do it for gaining their political interest and people were misled and so they engaged in incidents that harm peace and harmony. (November 1, 1990)

#### **"Convention urges Governmentt to talk with ULFA"**

Guwahati, December 16, The All Assam Democratic Citizen's Association organized a convention where they called for a peaceful settlement to the problem of ULFA through

negotiation. They also demanded immediate repeal of the Black Acts like Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Power Act which were in force at that time in Assam. Many delegates attended the convention from all over Assam; in the day-long convention delegates raised their concern over the prevailing situation in the state aftermath the imposition of the Presidential rule. The delegates condemned the terrorist infused violence in Assam but they appealed citizens to protest against some illicit communal forces prevailing in some parts of the country. As the people have their democratic rights so they suggested for using the rights and doing something for a negotiated settlement of the problem of ULFA. Moreover, instead of solving the problem with the sustainable way the government was adopting some repressive measures which creating a great hardship to the citizens. For this connection, the convention at the end of the day decided to set up a committee comprised of five members to mediate between the Government and the ULFA for pertaining a solution to the problem. They also opined that a democratic movement could only restore the basic values; therefore they decided to call for some special measures to create a congenial atmosphere for the pursuit of educational and cultural activities.

In the press release, the convention said that the members of the Assam Democratic Citizen's Association formally formed in Guwahati in a convention with unprecedented enthusiasm. They begged the citizens of Assam to listen to their humble examination of the current situation of Assam then to take necessary action. Realizing that people of Assam were living in a grip of fear and anxieties, anger and hatred, the convention appealed for an urgent step for creating negotiation between ULFA and the Centre. Though the convention had limited resources it would try to take the grave responsibilities on their shoulder voluntarily and they would try to discharge their best duties with earnest effort and dedication.

The convention held on the 16<sup>th</sup> December'90 was declared as one of the most significant events in the city in the last 50 years. Throughout the prolonged discussion, several important solutions had been adopted. A committee was nominated with the task initiating a discussion between the extremist youths and the Government with a view to restoring peace and recalling the misguided youth to democratic feelings. For fulfilling the tasks, a committee was formed to visit the places where the above-mentioned situation was prevailing so the visiting committee went to Lakhpathar and Saraipung areas.

Citizen's Convention Plea: Centre should talk to ULFA

Representatives of different places attended in a day-long convention held at district library auditorium in Guwahati; where the main agenda of the convention was to express a concern over the growing unwanted activities of the militant organization, ULFA. So, the Democratic Citizen's Convention (DCC) has made a plea to the Centre for creating a supportive and congenial atmosphere so that negotiation with ULFA could be held. The convention also demanded to repeal black laws from the State.

The DCC expressed concern over the gradual raising of ugly heads of communal and anti-democratic elements in different parts of the country. The DCC appealed to the citizens, irrespective of their political affiliations, to resist the growth of communalism in the country.

The convention stressed the need of democratic solutions to the present problems in the State and urged the journalists to give an objective analysis of the situation.

The DCC resolved to constitute a five-member study team to investigate the causes which led to different problems. The convention noted that the uprising of the terrorist and the communal elements had given rise to the element for a solution. All sections of the people in the state should come forward to strengthen the amity among different ethnic groups.

Mr. Pradip Acharya, in his secretarial report, mentioned that the DCC would always stand against any type of terrorism.

The open session was attended by Dr. Nagen Saikia, Mr. Loknath Goswami, Dr. Pabitra Kumar Sarm, Dr. Paramanada Mahanta, Mr. M S prabhakar and Mr. Arun Gogoi.

Besides, Mr. Golap Borbora, Mr. Sarat Chandra Sinha, Mr. Droupd Borgohain and Mr. Kamal Kumari Baruah, the convention was also addressed by Mr. Chandra Prasad Saikia, editor, 'Natun Dainik', Mr. Prafulla Chandra Baruah, editor Dainik Asom, Mr. D N Bezbaruah, editor The Sentinel and Mr. Binoy Bhusan Choudhary.

The convention was conducted by Dr. Hiren Gohain. Mr. Arun Sarma, Mrs. Preeti Baruah, Mr. Pradip Acharya, Mr. Udayaditya Bharali, Mr. Ganesh Das and Mr. Samiran Baruah.

A new committee of the DCC with Mr. Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati as president and Mr. Pradip Acharya as Secretary was constituted. (November 17, 1990)

Investigating team of the All Assam Democratic Citizen's Association (AADCA) went to Lakhpathar, a place situated in Tinsukia district of Assam, where a massive army operation was taken place. The team was comprised of Ms. Preeti Baruah, Mr. Pradip Acharya, Dr. Hiren Goain and Ms. Minati Hazarika. They prepared a report on the present status of that place.

Examining the real picture in the field the visiting team, they came to the conclusion that the reason for Assam's youth joining in the militarist was the result of economic frustration and lack of opportunity. This section of youths was using violence as a means to furthering its aims. So, they felt that they had to some real efforts to help them to come back to the mainstream. Through their report, they suggested for adopting either open approach or humanitarian approach whenever the situation demands. Security personnel is for maintaining law and order, thus the reports expressed that army should work in close association with the local administration. (January 8, 1991)

Unfortunately, the plea of AADCA went in vain as ULFA rejected AADCA's offer of mediation between the Central Government and the ULFA. In a press statement, ULFA's publicity secretary, Mr. Siddhartha Phukan made the opinion on that AADCA as an impartial mediator for proposed talk would not be good or up to the mark. ULFA scented a political motivation behind AADCA's concern over cries and weeps of the raped sisters and mothers of Assam. In the statement, ULFA also said that it was ridiculous that they were talking about providing security assurance for the leaders of ULFA during the proposed talk. For ULFA they had not embarked on the road for the sake of its own security rather, it wanted to provide security for the entire people of Assam from centre of from "New Delhi"

ULFA gave certain reasons for turning down the proposed negotiation offer of the convention of the journalists as in the following.

- a) The ULFA is not opposed to peaceful methods since it is forced to take arms in the absence of any other means of struggle. The ULFA does not believe in terrorism.
- b) The ULFA cherished peaceful and democratic solutions to all problems but will not bow down before the 'neo- colonist' rulers of Delhi under the pretext of peaceful solution.
- c) The ULFA welcomes any 'impartial' step taken to maintain peace and assures its full support to such moves.
- d) The ULFA struggle is aimed against the Delhi based 'Indian State machinery' and the 'big capitalist 'sponsored neo-colonialism' and not against the Indian people.
- e) The exploited toiling people of India are ULFA's allies and the capitalist run India's state machinery is the common enemy.
- f) The ULFA seeks the support and sympathy of the Indian people to the 'just demand for secession as of the entire world. (January 29, 1991)

### **The Role played by Asom Jatiyotabadi Yuba Chatro Parishad:**

*Asom Jatiyotabadi Yuba Chatro Parishad* (AJYCP) organized a huge mass meeting at Deochunga near Assam Bhutan border. By this mass gathering, an appeal was made to the insurgent's groups of Assam who were staying away from their homeland. These two major insurgent groups were requested to come back home by saying "*Ghoror lora ghorole ghuri aaha*". This voice was on behalf of the people of Assam to those insurgents who did believe in way of gun and taking shelter in neighboring Bhutan. A large number of people gathered spontaneously in this mass meeting and many renowned personalities of Assam such as ex. Chief Minister of Assam Golap Borbora, famous poet Hirendra Nath Dutta, Shivanath Barman etc. participated and pleaded for bringing back peace and unity to the insurgent groups. The Mass gathering was presided over by Dilip Patgiri, president of AJYCP. General Secretary of AJYCP, Apurba Bhattacharya told in his speech that Assam which was known for peace, harmony, and unity, now becoming a place of dead people due to violence and terror inflicted by armed conflicts. People of Assam and AJYCP could not tolerate such miseries anymore so people of Assam would not be silent speculator so they were requesting them to come forward for peace talks. ULFA was requested to come for cease-fire and sit in peace dialogue without any precondition. In this way, another National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) was also requested to come for cease-fire so that ambiance for peace talks could prevail and political solution to this problem of insurgency could be achieved. The Central government was also appealed to show a real interest in the initiative of the insurgent groups by proclaiming cease-fire with these insurgent groups. They also requested the central government to draw the tag of banned from ULFA and NDFB. The state government was requested to ensure security to the members of the insurgents and to drop the Unified Command Structure (UCS) law from Assam. The situation of Assam was not so secure and peaceful as this mass gathering was about to hold at Bogamati but it was canceled for ambush between army and ULFA. As per the request of the authority, the mass gathering was shifted to Deochunga from Bogamati as the situation of Bogamati did not recover. Indian army patrolling the place after the conflict had occurred. Thus, this mass gathering pleaded the both conflicting parties to come for cease-fire from the first day of 2001. (10 December 2000)

Family members of ULFA cadres appealed their sons, brothers to come forward and to create an ambiance for peace talks. As members of ULFA family Committee, they offer their plea to the

conflicting sides, ULFA and the government. Especially, Family members of Central Editor of ULFA, Chitrabon Hazarika pleaded ULFA to sit in peace talks in the first month of the year. (1<sup>st</sup> January 2004)

Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi commented Paresh Baruah was the main constraint of the peace talks. Every time a door for talk was opened, (2<sup>nd</sup> January 2004)

**Initiatives boarded by AASU (All Assam Students' Union):**

Sivasagar is the historic place glorifying the great rulers of Assam, the Ahoms. It is also the place where ULFA took birth at Rangpur. A concern for organizing a peace talk was held at a meeting organized by AASU in Sivasagar on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2004. At this meeting, the local AASU leaders made the earnest request of the ULFA leaders to come forward for peace dialogue on the soil of a foreign country.

In this meeting, representatives from other civil society organizations, known journalists, social activists etc. also participated.

Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) had made an appeal to both the sides to stop unnecessary killings and remain in patience for the sake of peace talks. Whereabouts of missing ULFA leaders were also unknown for their families so, President of AJYCP Pradip Kumar Goswami and General Secretary Gopinath Das appealed the Government to provide whereabouts of those missing ULFA. Central Government started the initiative of peace making in a very trumpeting way. The peace process was not maintained the way it started as the Central as well State Government did not continue the enthusiasm and ignored it. Rather they were continuing the killing of ULFA in fake encounters and pretending to continue peace talks for namesake. (August 4, 2006)

**The role of played by Peoples' Consultative Group (PCG) and Peoples' Committee for Peace Initiative in Assam:**

ULFA demanded the fulfillment of the resolutions taken by the Central Government. Aftermath the third round of talks held on 22 June 2006, the Central Home Minister Shivraj Patil assured to free the topmost leaders of ULFA to sit in a peace dialogue. (July 2, 2006)

The PCG opined for direct peace dialogue between ULFA and Indian Government as ULFA's leaders had faith and Indian Government's good will. For this to be done Indian Government had to give up the divide and rule attitude. This may harm the peace dialogue. (July 9, 2006)

The solution to the problem of ULFA is reachable only when the central government takes a proper role in this matter with true sense. The unemployment problem in Assam leads the youth generation for taking arms in their hands. (January 8, 2004)

PCPIA alleged Indian Government is the responsible for the stalemate condition of the proposed dialogue between central government and ULFA. The organization has sent a press release to the newspaper and they complained that the central government is still continuing a colonial mentality towards Assam and its problems. Despite completing the three rounds of dialogues with PCG central government is least interested to solve the problem. In spite of the three rounds of dialogues, the central government again seeking a written letter from ULFA and also the list of the members of PCG. So, PCPIA condemning this act as two-faced character of the central government. ULFA is in cease-fire but army personnel of Indian government still harassing and torturing the people. PCPIA condemned this brutal activity as a betrayal to the peace talks.

Response from the government of India:

Ambience for sitting peace talk government of India decided to release the chief leaders of ULFA. The Home Ministry reiterated to communicate directly with the centre. Mamoni Raisom Goswami who played the role of chief coordinator talked with the representatives of the Central Government, Chief Secretary of the Central Government K. Duggal, Chief of RAW, E.L. Narasigham, Joint Secretary of Home Ministry, Rajiv Agarwal in a closed-door meeting. In the meeting, these government officials of Home Ministry discussed the conditions given by ULFA for once again. Goswami had full trust in the response of Central Government that it would be positive towards the most awaited peace talk. The freeing of detainees was guaranteed by the Central Government. If they communicate directly then the talk would happen in the last part of the month of August in New Delhi irrespective of any condition met by ULFA.

The reaction of the State Government to this peace talk:

The State Government also stood on the same opinion that for peace talks to hold, ULFA had to communicate directly with the Government. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi confided on the same stand as central government and said that it would be one side track unless ULFA takes direct communication with the government. Referring the ongoing direct talk between NSCN and Central Government Gogoi talked on cease-fire had to be ensured by ULFA. Otherwise, the people would blame the government for further violence done by ULFA.

The opinion of other civil society on this most awaited peace talk:

Senior Citizen Sanmilon too urged both sides to sit in peace talk keeping any condition. Likewise NSCN, both the sides had to put down guns for the sake of peace talks.

Reaction from the media regarding the peace talks:

In the editorial page of Dainik Asom, Munindra Das presented media's perspectives on the most talked peace talks between ULFA and Central Government on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2016. The most awaited peace talk initiated by PCG created an ambiance of hope for building peace in the region. As soon as this good ambiance got started, people also started to worry about uncertainty aroused with time. Though the beginning of peace talks was bombastic, it turned to black as the conflicting parties stood in the opposite pole. PCG which was created solely by ULFA had been raising the demand for the detention of the five key leaders for sustaining the talk. PCG tried to draw the attention of all sides of concerned people by publicizing their issues and demands through media. Especially they emphasized the main issue of their talk as freeing of the detenués while publicizing the peace talks. Regarding the freeing of five top leaders, PCG's perception was that for sake of taking a common decision by ULFA these leaders voice was a must. These five cadres were Bhimkanta Buragohain, Political Advisor, Pradip Gogoi, Vice President, Pranati Gogoi, Cultural Secretary, Mithinga Daimari, Publicity Secretary and Ramu Mech, a member of the General Council. According to ULFA, the issue if freeing these detenués was taken seriously by Central as well as State Government from starting. Accordingly, Home Minister, Shivraj Patil assured for releasing them after the third round of talk. The last and third round of talk cleared this probability. Later, Central Government's stand on this issue turned into the complex side. The government announced to take care of the freeing of detenués only if ULFA communicate directly with either Central or State Government. The editorial page regarded the peace talk and

freeing of detainees as a positive accolade compared to the situation in 1991 and 1996. The initiatives of peace talk and freeing of detainees in 1991 and 1996 were gripped into political mud. State government never showed any positive interest to the initiatives made by ULFA. The state government took the divide and rule policy in the name of peace talks. When PCG was constructed and a ray of hope for peace talks was initiated by Central Government, the State Government was bounded to keep up their game of politics in their pocket. Moreover, the previous attempts were tracked as one-sided initiative by State Government. Whether the circumstances demanded or as a result of Mamoni Roisom Goswami's sole initiatives, ULFA took the step for peace talk by themselves. (July 22, 2006)

As Central Government asked ULFA to correspond directly with them, ULFA sent their letter with Dr. Mamoni Roisom Goswami. That letter contained three pre-conditions before going to any direct talk. The first condition was that the government had to release the top five ULFA leaders. If they got release ULFA could select the members from them who would represent the direct talk. Secondly, the government had to give the list of the ULFA cadres who had been missing since the Bhutan Operation. Thirdly, the peace talks would be held with the demand for sovereignty. (July 27, 2006)

In the meantime, the government did not take talk friendly action that creates ambiance for a talk. In Tinsukia district of Assam, at the Laipuli based army camp, PCPIA leaders talked about army operation in a sitting held between Army persons and leaders of PCPIA. During this sitting, 181 Mountain Brigadier Bali assured that the general people would not be affected by the army's search operation in future. But army's searching operation would be still continued unless ULFA stops demanding ransom money and other illicit activities. PCPIA protested against the harassing of general innocent people in the name of searching for ULFA Cadres. In villages like Philobari army were harassing those innocent people.

For the sake of peace talks to hold peacefully, the government was keen to arrange the peace talks. Home Secretary V. K. Duggal sent a direct letter to ULFA through the media assuring that government was very keen to arrange the most awaited peace talk. Though in many times peace talk seemed to lock in uncertainty, government tried best to remove the uncertainties and to start the process of peace talk. PCG demanded that if the government keeps adding new conditions to the peace talks then government solely would be a responsible failure of the talk. Direct letter to

ULFA for sitting in peace talk was a step by the government and this way they passed the ball to ULFA. The Home Ministry was waiting for ULFA's response and a high official expressed the view of government that they were in the hope that ULFA would send a letter containing the list of participants by ULFA who would represent the peace talks. Listed ULFA cadres would give a chance to free movement.

In the middle of the itinerary of peace talk initiatives, army operations against ULFA were being conducted by Government. In Nalbari district, two ULFA cadres were killed and one was detained during an ambush between ULFA and Indian Army. Moreover, in other several operations, ULFA cadres were killed in places like Garo Hills and Margherita. PCPIA condemned these killings of ULFA saying that the government did not have any interest for peace talks. The government did try to bring peace through killings only but not by sitting in dialogue. (August 1, 2006)

This act of Government really took the desired peace talk into a place of uncertainty. Even the advisor of National Security M. K. Narayan expressed his worry to the co-coordinator of the peace talk Mamoni Roisom Goswami. When Mamoni Roisom Goswami met Narayan to seek a solution for the growing uncertainties on the desired peace talk, then Narayan said that regarding the army operation against ULFA he could not do anything. As ULFA did not announce cease-fire so army operation against them could not be called off. The advisor of National security blamed ULFA's ignorance as a reason for the growing uncertainties and delaying of the targeted peace talk. (August 3, 2006)

In such gloomy circumstances where peace- talk became a mere doubtful option, PCPIA started a movement for 15 days. As a part of the movement, they sent a memorandum letter to the Prime Minister through the Sub-Divisional Officer. The memorandum letter contained five basic demands. Direct peace talks between ULFA and Government as soon as possible, to stop the Army's search operation for the sake of smooth conduct of the peace talk, freeing of the five detainees, provide information about the missing ULFA cadres and bring justice for the massacre of Kakopathar incident; these five demands were raised by PCPIA. About 17 numbers of organizations under the collaboration of PCPIA arranged a rally and they sent memorandum from various places like Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, and Tinsukia. Memorandum to the Prime Minister was sent from these places through either Sub-divisional

officers (SDO) or the District Commissioner (DC) of the respective places. Even in Guwahati, under the leadership of Lachit Bordoloi from MASS and Dilip Gogoi from AJYCP, a protest rally of more than three hundred people met the DC of Kamrup and they submitted the memorandum and sent it to the Prime Minister via DC. In the same way, in Sivasagar too people from PCPIA which is the collaborative platform of 25 different organizations met the DC and they too submitted a memorandum to the honorable President of India and Prime Minister through the DC of Sivasagar. The Memorandum contained nine steps where the main agenda was that in the name of dominating insurgency more than ten thousand people were killed and human rights of the people were immensely violated. Demanding for a peaceful solution to the insurgency problem, direct dialogue between ULFA and Government and to stop the army search operation they marched for a rally in the Sivasagar town where five hundred people took participation in the mass rally. (August 5, 2006)

The series of army search operation was not stopping for next year too. In the name of insurgency operation, many ULFA cadres were killed in fake encounter. PCPIA warned the army not to keep engaging in the fake encounter of ULFA. They also demanded the Government to arrange the peace dialogue before Bihu festival so that permanent peace could be brought to Assam.

Representatives of the Government responded to the urge of the PCPIA saying that ULFA had to give up the condition of sovereignty. Central Minister Bijoy Krishna Handique commented on the failure of peace talks. He had said that instead of joining directly with the Central Government, ULFA tried to talk indirectly with the help of PCG and that became the reason for the failure of the peace talks. He also mentioned that if ULFA really wanted to sit in peace talks for bringing permanent peace then they had to leave the pre-condition of sovereignty because the Prime Minister could not talk on sovereignty. State Minister Bijoy Krishna Handique in a press meeting held at Sivasagar commented above the statement. (April 12, 2007)

The reaction of other organizations to the initiatives of PCG and PCPIA was cooperative. One human rights organization called '*Pohar*' supported the cause of PCG and individual initiative of Mamoni Roisom Goswami. (April 14, 2007)

Both Central, as well as State Government, tried to handle the peace talk erroneously. In one hand, the central government was trying to convince ULFA that direct peace talks would be conducted, on the other hand, central government planned to attack in all camps of ULFA to arrest them. The reason behind attacking ULFA's camp was to compel ULFA to sit in peace-talk forcefully, for this central government gave diplomatic stress to the neighboring countries Bangladesh and Myanmar where ULFA take shelters. (April 17, 2007)

PCPIA organized a sit-in with the wives of the missing ULFAs with the demands like to start a direct talk, to free the top ULFA leaders who have been missing from an army operation. Demanding the information about their respective husbands who were missing since the Bhutan army operation, the wives were on the fasting unto death. For supporting the cause of ULFA leaders wives PCPIA arranged the sit-in at the Lakhidhar Bora Khetra from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. In this programme, representatives from different organizations such as Chief Secretary of PCPIA Dilip Patgiri, Lachit Bordoloi, General Secretary of AJYCP Monoj Baruah, Advisor of All Assam Unemployed Association Babul Barua, member of TMPK Prasanta Kumar Bori and Amiya Buragohain from Asom Mahila Sacheton Mancho and Budheswari Saikia from Larger Guwahati Women Forum ensured their participation and support to this respect. (April 24, 2007)

PCG and PCPIA were working together though they both were different organizations. When wives of missing ULFA canceled their fasting under the influence of letter received from Chief Minister and talking with Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, conflict aroused between these organizations. Few members from PCPIA alleged that Hiranya Saikia of PCG involved in a conspiracy politics. He washed the brains of those wives lured them to leave their fasting. Lachit Bordoloi, another member of PCG also confirmed this through his statement which made a mystery out of the whole incident. (April 28, 2007)

PCPIA called for National Highway blockade for freeing of the detenues in different places of Assam. (April 30, 2007)

Though PCPIA demanded that they were a platform for 27 non-political organizations, in due time questions about their transparency aroused by different people especially by the security department i.e. police of Assam. Former D.I.G of Assam Sasanka Baruah had confessed that he

was the mastermind of PCPIA and all the activities were conducted by his direction. The organizational set-up of PCPIA was also looked after by him. Superintendent of Police (Operation) Jitmal Doley confirmed this flick when the peace talks between ULFA and Central government was in doubt. Moreover, Jitmal Doley also said that they were looking into the matter of conflict between PCG and PCPIA due to the ending up of the fasting by the wives of the missing ULFA leaders. The police department, however, did not plan to arrest any of the leaders of PCPIA. (April 30, 2007)

In the meantime Chief Minister of Assam made the statement that ULFA did not have any interest for enduring peace and prosperity in Assam. State government blamed ULFA for restraining the possibility of peace talks. By killing six Hindi speaking people ULFA shed terror and violence once again. On the other hand, CM figured out that PCPIA was responsible for the death of ten people in a road blockade program at Dumduma. (May 17, 2007)

Central Government denied initiating peace talks with ULFA even after state government requested for initiating a new series for a talk with the outfit. ULFA continued to exercise terror with bomb blasting. Thus Central Government fixed new condition for starting the peace talks. Firstly, ULFA had to give the means of violence. Second, ULFA had to declare cease-fire. Third, if this time peace talks to happen then only the top and senior leaders had to present at the peace talks. By this condition, the government completely turned down the involvement of mediator regarding this peace talk. (May 29, 2007)

Peace talk was frozen for discontentment and breaking of primary rules by both the conflicting sides. To request for taking action to rejuvenate the talk, representatives of civil society under the banner of Citizen Peace Forum (*Nagarik Shanti Mancha*) visited Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. Dr. Mamoni Roisom Goswami led the team and they appealed for restarting the process of peace talks, in this regard the team also visited Home Minister Shivraj Patil. Other members of the team were the advisor of Citizen Peace Forum, Shuchibrata Raichoudhury, Dr. Arun Goswami and Secretary Mafchika Begum. (June 12, 2007)

Reacting to the appeal of the Citizen Peace Forum, central government said that the peace talks would be restart if top leaders like Arabinda Rajkhowa or Paresh Baruah come forward to talk

directly. Moreover central government also ensured that if ULFA want they could send a envoy on behalf of ULFA. But there would be no pre-condition for the talk. (13 June, 2007)

Central Government in general and Prime Minister in particular opined for direct talks with ULFA to resume the peace talks. Either Paresh Baruah or Arabinda Rajkhowa could join in the direct peace talks according to the central government. But they also made an alternative by saying that if any of the two main leaders was not ready to come for the talk, in that case any of the executive members of ULFA could join the peace talks. Government would sit only with the cadres of ULFA not with any other person from any organization or outside ULFA was not welcomed by central government. Central Government's this opinion or decision was enough to wash off the involvement of PCG and initiative of civil society from the most awaited peace talk.

In such a doubtful situation, the peace talk lost its desired direction and finally, PCG pulled out from peace talks with the Union Government. (June 29, 2007)

#### **The role played by *Sanmilito Jatiyo Abhibartan*:**

After the failure of initiatives taken up by PCG and PCPIA, another bold initiative was brought up by Hiren Gohain led civil society convention. It is often said that Assam does not have a reckoning of proactive civil society initiative or example of any civil society who allows others to do good for the society's well-being. The convention was organized by Citizen's Forum where 125 different civil society organizations attended the one-day long convention. According to the organizers of this convention, this was the largest congregation of people and nearly 1500 delegates were present from different civil society organizations. All the effort was boldly led by the greatest intellectual of Assam, Dr. Hiren Gohain and he was accompanied by writer-activist Mamoni Roisom Goswami and others on the daice. Despite the convention had to face obstacles while organizing especially from ULFA's leader Paresh Barua. The main agenda of this convention was to appeal for unconditional and early talks between ULFA and the Centre so that an end comes to the decades-long bloodbath in the state. So-called Commander-in- chief Paresh Barua rejected the initiative saying that ULFA could not compromise the sovereignty issue as pre-condition for peace talks. Other leaders of the outfit mainly chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, deputy commander-in-chief Raju Baruah, self-styled foreign secretary Sasha Choudhury, finance

secretary Chitaban Hazarika, cultural secretary Pranati Deka, and ULFA political ideologue Bhimkanta Buragohain; all offered full support to the initiative of this convention.

Background of the Convention was based on the failure of the initiative taken by the People's Consultative Group (PCG) to find a solution to more than three-decade insurgency problem of Assam. Instead of becoming a platform of the pro-talks or anti-talks group of ULFA, this convention liked to declare it as spokesman to the people of Assam. Whereas PCG was formed by ULFA and it was coordinated by Paresh Barua but the conclave tried to convey the message of the every common people to both the conflicting parties so that peace talks could get new momentum. President of the conclave Dr. Hiren Gohain asserted that there was no goodwill from one particular group and that group did not want the convention to get success for their own personal self-interests. Dr. Gohain expressed regret for the failure of PCG saying it was failed due to the internal clashes and the rigidity of the government. Even the state and central government should remove their differences regarding the ULFA issue to carry forward the peace process. Internal differences of PCG was still showing off as the convention was presented by notable peace activists and most trusted face of Assam for convention Lachit Bordoloi and Dilip Patgiri but it was deserted by other notable members of PCG like journalist Ajit Bhuyan, lawyer Arup Borbora, Hiranya Saikia and Haidar Hussain. Moreover, Dr. Gohain also expressed his feelings on Paresh Barua's statements given to the media were only hampering the peace initiative taken up by the convention. He adamantly was making comments that without sovereignty the peace cannot happen.

It was an obvious expression of a large number of the delegates and speakers that Paresh Barua's role in the peace process as he was a key factor. Thus these speakers eulogized the Commander-in-Chief Paresh Barua and warned against his absence in the peace process or without his direct involvement peace could not be achievable.

Seven draft resolutions were announced at the end of the convention. Firstly, unconditional talks at the highest level would be held that would involve both government and ULFA. Second, jailed ULFA leaders would be released immediately and all pending cases against them would be suspended till a solution to issue arrived. Third, ULFA had to hold the central committee meeting immediately and the suggestions made during convention should be considered or adopted. Fourth, there should be no time wasting tactics. As the previous example of peace talks

showed it so, the immediate solution should be achieved. Fifth, once the talk starts, the government should not treat ULFA as an insurgent outfit so, they had to treat all the cadres cordially. Sixth, When ULFA gets a positive response from the government; ULFA should give up the arms. Seventh, a nine-member committee of the Citizen Forum has been selected and they would be the main decision-making body. Eight, three or four members of the convention would go to the capital to submit the proposal.

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi reacted to the convention by saying that the government was ready for negotiation. So, the government was waiting to see the first step by ULFA and how they react to the resolutions adopted by the convention. It was also added by the CM that ULFA should first abjure violence and lay down arms. One of the important resolutions taken in the convention was that the government would release the jailed leaders to for enabling them to hold their general council meeting to take a decision regarding peace talks with the government. (June 16-30, July 1-15, 2010)

As one of resolutions six-member team of the Citizen's Forum of Assam's civil society met to bid a develop a national consensus on the ULFA issue. A six-member committee went the capital to meet Prime Minister, Home Minister and UPA President Sonia Gandhi. The group was led by Dr. Hiren Gohain and other members of the group were comprised of Hiranya Bhattacharya, a retired IPS officer, Dr, Nirmal Choudhury, former Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University, Rohini Barua, a former bureaucrat of Assam Government and two educationists Indibor Deuri and Kursheed Alam. The Citizen Forum was an 11 member committee comprising of writers, retired police officers, academics, army officers and right leaders and the forum claimed that it had the support of at least 100 other civil society and ethnic groups for their cause. If the conclave held in April could able to resolve a brokered peace then it would put the curtain down to more than three-decade long insurgency turned terrorism on the soil of Assam. Dr. Hiren Gohain said about their meeting over the dignified personalities with a hope that the jailed leaders would come out of the jail in the next three months if all happen systematically. He expected that the state government would not mind to the bail petitions of the ULFA leaders and in the following three months groundworks would be completed. As this would take time, so he was expecting to the formal talk happen in the month of February in the next year. Though it would take some time, Dr. Hiren Gohain was quite hopeful the process would start at the earnest

and there was nothing to worry about as Assam, according to him Assam awaited 30 years for the peace. Although any one of the members of the Citizen Forum did not support ULFA's demand for sovereignty they were concern that ULFA had always kept demand for sovereignty as their prime condition for a talk.

One of the resolutions at the convention held in April was to seek the release of all jailed leaders. Top leaders of ULFA were still behind the bar of jail; Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, deputy commander-in-chief Raju Baruah, self-styled foreign secretary Shasha Choudhury, finance secretary Chitraban Hazarika, cultural secretary Pranati Deka, and ULFA political ideologue Bhimakanta Buragohain. Civil Society of Assam was reiterating the government to release these top ULFA leaders to make the peace process smooth as the free leaders could hold their General Council meeting to take the formal decision of the talk. Excepting the elusive commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, almost every top leaders inside and outside jail were keen to start a political process to end up the three-decade long war against the Indian State. Paresh Barua was not ready to talk without sovereignty.

Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi said to the media that a majority of the top leaders were ready for talk so the government might employ P. C. Halder as the interlocutor of the peace talks. While talking about the absence of Paresh Barua, CM said that government could not wait for Paresh Barua for an indefinite time though he had not any positive attitude to join the peace process.

Paresh Barua though always had made sovereignty as the major issue for talk but he was making some occasional statement on the initiative of the Citizen Forum. On the other hand likes of Dr. Hiren Gohain arranged press conferences to express their anger on the government who was not moving any further step for holding the peace talks. No major movements from any camp of ULFA and Union Home Ministry had been noticed. There were some sidetracking elements that pushed back the peace process successfully. For example, the emergence of the 1000 crore scandal at Hill District Council and the advent of popular public crusader like Akhil Gogoi successfully pushed back the entire endeavour of Citizen Forum to the background. (August 15-August 31, 2010)